



THE UNIQUENESS OF GANCH CARVING ART IN THE DECORATION OF TASHKENT MOSQUES

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Abstract:

This article explores the role of ganch carving art in the decoration of mosques in Tashkent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords: Islam, mosque, ganch, mausoleum, khanaka, minbar, dome.

Nowadays, the mosques of Tashkent and the creative works of master artisans contribute to the development of Islamic art in the country. Craftsmen who preserve traditional decorative techniques continue the master-apprentice heritage, while those introducing new projects and styles lay the foundation for emerging artistic schools. The newly built mosques in Tashkent not only maintain the traditional architectural style of Central Asia but also serve as unique monuments that synthesize various architectural traditions, incorporating new forms. These mosques showcase the exceptional craftsmanship of Uzbek artisans, embodying innovative designs and techniques. Woodcarvers, ganch masters, potters, and painters contribute to the spiritual atmosphere of Muslim mosques, creating an environment essential for religious and liturgical practices.

In the history of Uzbek folk applied arts, ganch carving holds a significant place as an architectural element that adds a unique and inimitable character to structures. This art form has a long history, with some of the earliest examples found in Central Asia, such as the decoration of the palace complex in Topraq-qala (3rd–4th centuries) and the floral patterns, fish, birds, and finely sculpted alabaster depictions of animals in the Varakhsha residence. The artisans who created these wall decorations took inspiration from flora and fauna, stylizing their motifs in a distinctive artistic manner. In the process of applying ganch to walls, a thick layer



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of alabaster was first spread over the walls, columns, or portals, followed by freehand carvings without stencils. Over centuries, this craft evolved by adopting new techniques and styles, much like other branches of applied arts. Today, in the era of New Uzbekistan, Uzbek traditional ganch carving is experiencing a revival, blending thousands of years of historical influences while preserving its deep-rooted traditions in a modern form. The period of national independence has played a crucial role in restoring Islamic cultural values, and from 2016 to 2024, the construction of new mosques in Tashkent has inspired architects, artists, and master artisans, further fueling creative enthusiasm and innovation in their work.

The development of Islamic art in Uzbekistan is evident not only in the religious and educational structures being built across the country but also in the stylistic elements, forms, and artistic decoration of secular buildings. This progress is reflected in the craftsmanship of artisans who create stunning architectural embellishments.

In many mosques of Tashkent, wooden ceilings, ganch carvings, and decorative calligraphy are adorned with colorful patterns applied using traditional ornamentation techniques. While Tashkent's decorative arts exhibit unique characteristics, they also differ from the artistic traditions of Fergana, Khiva, and Bukhara. However, it is noticeable that Fergana's decorative school had a significant influence on Tashkent's artistic style, as many Fergana craftsmen were actively engaged in the city's architectural projects.

In the decoration of newly built mosques in Tashkent, the contributions of decorative artists, calligraphers, woodcarvers, and ganch masters play a significant role. One such distinguished artisan is Hakim Inagamov, who was awarded the honorary title of "People's Master of Uzbekistan" in 2015. His craftsmanship is evident in the intricate ganch decorations of several newly constructed and renovated mosques in the capital, including Sheikh Zayniddin (2011), Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (2015), Islam Ota (2016), Mukhsimkhon Tura (2017-2018), Ubay ibn Ka'b (2017-2018), Firdaus (2019), Siroj Solih (2020-2021), Eshon Bobokhon (2020-2021), Darul Salam (2020-2021), and many others. His work showcases a variety of ganch carving techniques, blending traditional artistry with contemporary innovation. Hakim Inagamov began his artistic journey in 1986, studying under Mansurjon Murodov, a renowned academician and People's Master of Uzbekistan. Over the years, through dedication



and experience, he has become a master of ganch carving. Today, he continues to preserve the "master-apprentice" tradition by mentoring nearly 30 students, passing down the complex techniques and unique styles of Uzbek ganch carving to future generations. Together with his apprentices, each new project is approached with great responsibility and attention to detail. His creative process not only incorporates traditional techniques but also integrates modern technologies and innovative forms, ensuring that each composition reflects both historical legacy and contemporary artistic demands.

The master's ability to blend traditional designs with modern artistic trends, adapting his work to contemporary demands, is one of his greatest achievements. His craftsmanship is distinguished by the effective and appropriate use of modern construction materials, ensuring that each decorative element he creates has a unique artistic solution. A hallmark of his work is the harmonization of traditional white ganch compositions with vibrant, multicolored decorations, reflecting a balance between national heritage and modern aesthetics.

Through his relentless dedication, continuous research, and innovative approach, Hakim Inagamov has gained recognition and praise from renowned masters in the field. His artistic legacy in Uzbek ganch carving includes a series of notable works such as "Blue Sky," "Sajda," "When the Jiyda Blooms," "Beautiful Smile," "Breath of Spring," "Seven Heavens," "Shams," "Unity," "Tulip," and "Rose." These creations, ranging from large-scale to intricate decorative pieces, showcase his mastery in ganch carving and ornamental art.

Hakim Inagamov is one of the master artisans who has breathed new life into Uzbek architecture and tilework, playing a vital role in ensuring the continuity of ancient artistic traditions. The ganch carvings in Tashkent mosques are distinguished by their intricate patterns, delicate relief techniques, and Arabic calligraphy. This art form enriches both the interior and exterior of religious structures, enhancing their aesthetic and spiritual significance. Today, the craftsmanship of ganch masters remains highly valued, and their artistic legacy continues to thrive, contributing to the preservation and evolution of both historic and newly built mosques in Tashkent. It is important to highlight the significant contributions of ganch masters such as M. Murodov, A. Karimov, H. Inagamov, A. Ilhomov, and A. Sultanov, among others,



in the decoration of mosques. Among them, Hakim Inagamov stands out as a key figure in the development of the traditional Tashkent ganch carving school. His artistry has played an essential role in preserving and evolving this craft, as he has been the creator of intricate ganch decorations in numerous mosques throughout the capital.

In Tashkent, carved patterns are traditionally crafted from white ganch, though in recent years, the kundal technique with gold leaf detailing has become increasingly popular, adding a more expressive and vibrant effect. The designs frequently feature a combination of girih (geometric interlacing) and Islamic motifs, along with epigraphic Arabic calligraphy. The choice of carving techniques—whether engraved, embossed, kundal, or mold-cast—is carefully adapted to suit the architectural context of each building. This adaptability has become a defining feature of the modern evolution of Tashkent's ganch carving school. Additionally, ornamental painting (naqqosh art) has been seamlessly integrated into these structures, complementing the intricate ganch carvings to create a harmonious artistic composition.

During this period of development in the Tashkent school of ganch carving and ornamentation, it was common to see floral patterns influenced by the Fergana decorative style. This influence can be attributed to the fact that many artisans from the Fergana Valley cities—Kokand, Margilan, Khujand, Uratyube, and Andijan—played a significant role in the construction of Tashkent mosques, particularly in wood carving, ganch work, and architectural design. Furthermore, calligraphic elements were an integral part of mosque decorations, with Quranic verses and surahs elegantly inscribed on the walls as a part of the artistic ornamentation.